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INSIDE TODAY

U.S. NEWS

SNOWED IN



Snow covers an interstate I-80 sign, Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2009, in Des Moines, Iowa. More than a foot of snow was expected in parts of Illinois, Wisconsin and Iowa, where the National Weather Service warned of "extremely dangerous blizzard conditions" and near whiteout driving conditions.

Read more on Page B5

SPORTS NEWS

CONGRESS BOWL



In this Dec. 5, 2009, photo Alabama defensive back Rod Woodson (18), linebacker Jonathan Atchison, center, and defensive lineman Darrington Sentimore (94) celebrate after their 32-13 win over Florida in the NCAA college football SEC championship game at the Georgia Dome in Atlanta.

Associated Press

Read more on Page B10

Students of Ateliers '89 explore video as a medium of creative expression

ORANJESTAD - Ateliers '89 is an island foundation originally conceptualized by artists Elvis Lopez and Evelino Fingal in the year of its name, and opened again by Elvis eighteen months ago. Its purpose: to stimulate original and unconventional thought and creativity in all branches of the arts; visual, performing and literary, its method: free one-month workshops by recognized artists in the various fields from Holland, the U.S. and Aruba.

Thursday, December 3, the school, located on the Dominicanstraat just behind the San Pedro de Verona Home for the Elderly in Oranjestad, hosted a premiere of the results of their latest workshop by video artists Alberto de Michele and Erik Alkema of Holland.

Continued on Next Page



Elvis and Erik in back, Alberto and students in front

Norwegian couple celebrate new home in Aruba

NOORD - Alf Lunde and Nina Kristiansen reached the highest point on their home that is being built by Giovanni de Vecchia. The ocean view two story home in Noord is their dream come true vacation home for Alf and Nina and their children. As a great surprise on the eve of reaching the highest roof-top point on their home, Alf proposed marriage to Nina and she accepted. With only one visit to Aruba, they fell in love with the island and purchased property on Aruba.

Continued on Page 3



Nature's Beauty

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Students of Ateliers '89 explore video as a medium of creative expression



Continued from Front Page

The two instructors informed the gathering they were quite proud of the results produced by ten students after only four weeks of intensive classes, four nights per week.

"We have produced thirty individual videos, which we consider remarkable for the time frame we had," commented Alberto during the opening, "the students

worked very hard, and we are very proud of what they have accomplished."

"We are particularly pleased by the changes in their perception of video work," added Erik, "when they first began the course, they were set in the idea that making videos was about following a script and telling a story. We wanted them to realize that the medium lends itself to

visual artistic expression, and to focus more on the images they could create, which in themselves, like a painting on canvas, can tell a story, but not in the conventional "Hollywood filmmaker" fashion."

"Eventually, the techniques they learned through the assignments we gave them, such as using a green screen, would lead to more creative use of the camera if they do choose to produce a video that does follow a script and tells a story," concluded Alberto.

The thirty videos are screened in two rooms continually, presenting a similar experience to looking at paintings in a gallery; the impression is of complete immersion in a constantly changing art installation. There is a great deal of humor, visual effects and imagination revealed to the observer and one is inclined to spend quite some time enthralled by the constant flicker of changing images.

This was the last workshop for 2009; the work will remain on display, along with the results of the previous classes with Marjolijn Ruyg and Mariken Wessles. They focused on graphic art and very unique photographic interpretation, titled "Aruba Inside Out" and "Zoom in, Zoom out." Both expositions will continue until completion of the next workshop, which will be in 2010 and has yet to be announced. Combined, the two exhibitions provide a



fascinating display of creativity using modern mediums and the Avant-Garde. They can be seen Monday through Friday during school hours, from

9:00 AM until 6:00 PM.

For information about the school and directions call Elvis at telephone 588-5776 or 563-4613. □





Are you ready for your big surprise

Hmmm?



Norwegian couple celebrate new home in Aruba



Continued from Front Page

They consider Aruba their home away from home and have full intention to spend as much time possible vacationing with their children on Aruba.

De Vecchia says, "I started building houses for visitors 18 years ago, but the trend has really picked up over the last seven years. People want all comforts



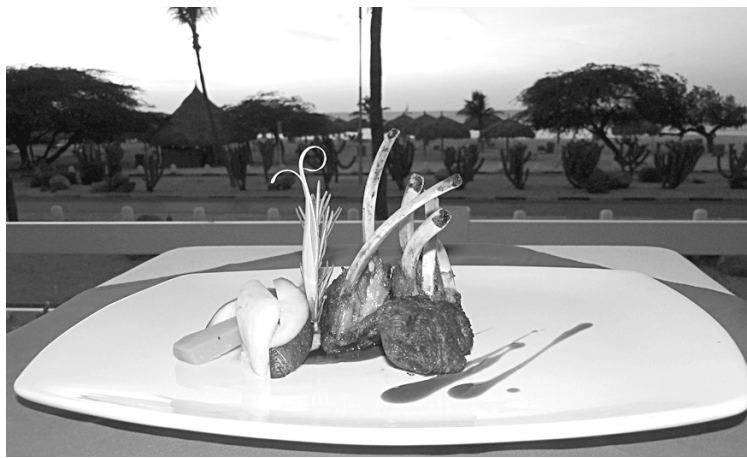
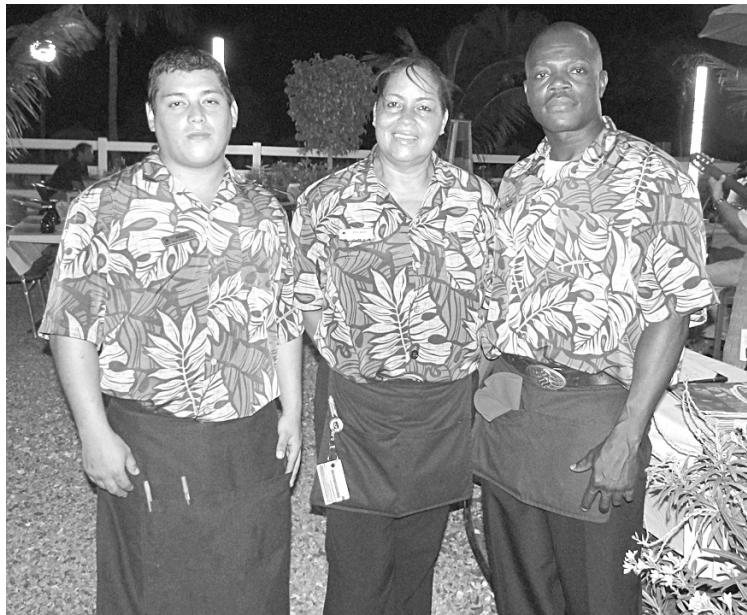
they are used to at home but with Aruba's relaxing atmosphere, perfect weather and community life. We are able to provide this by finding the best location,

designing and building the house and even going to the extent of providing furnishing and maintenance plans." □

~ Photos by Julia Renfro ~



Las Ramblas meets applause



EAGLE BEACH – La Cabana Beach & Racquet Club continues to garner compliments for the food and the ambiance at Las Ramblas, its intimate seaside promenade-side restaurant.

Open last year, and graced with a lovely menu composed by executive chef Sonny Partodikromo and Food & Beverage Manager Pierre Kock, the restaurant is continuously met by enthusiastic rounds of applause.

Las Ramblas features authentic Spanish cuisine with a Catalan / Mediterranean slant. Dinner is served under a canopy of stars, in view of the beach and the gently swaying palm fronds, in a most romantic setting.

Guests may start their culinary journey with delicious Eggplant Rollatini, Grilled Scallops or Pinchitos, mini grilled beef kebabs on the list of tapas, and continue with Steamed Mussels or Escargot Bourguignon as warm appetizers. General Manager Joe Najaar introduced his favorite appetizer: diced fresh avocado topped with shrimp and drizzled with a tangy Calypso sauce!

Main courses from the grill deliver juicy steaks and fresh seafood. The highlights of the menu being the Surf & Turf, a



happy marriage of grilled shrimp, scallops and a petite tenderloin, and the famed plentiful Paella, simmered in a fragrant saffron broth.

The restaurant grows its own herb garden, which is used in the seasoning of all dishes.

Las Ramblas is now open for dinner nightly, except Wednesdays & Sundays, serving Spanish and Mediterranean specialties, all cooked on an open fire grill, in front of the pool deck at La Cabana Beach & Racquet Club, overlooking Eagle Beach



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Students Celebrate the Upcoming Holidays



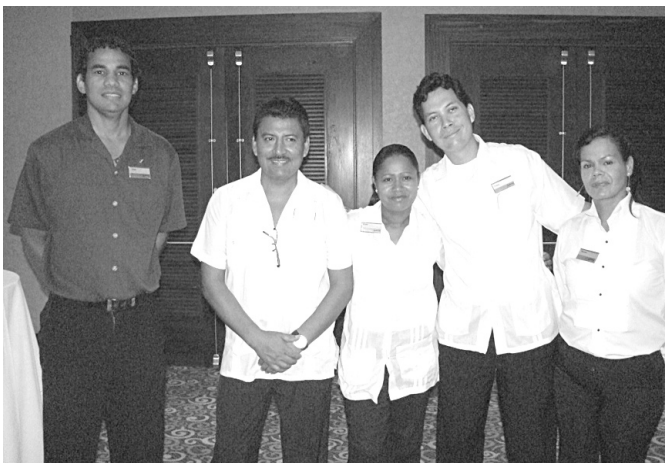
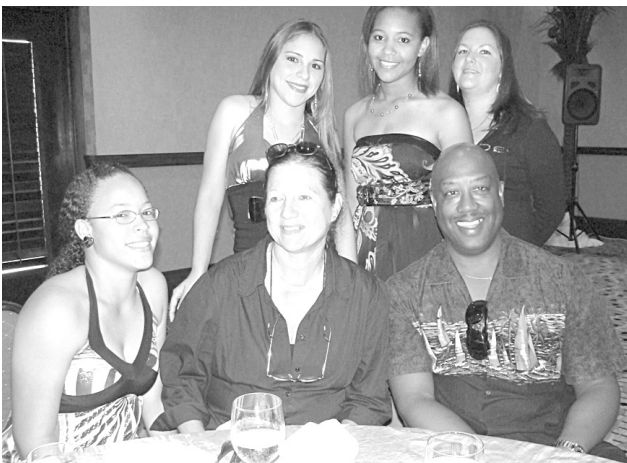
PALM BEACH – The EPI at the Grand Caribbean secondary school, Public Ballroom, Radisson Aruba Health sector, celebrated the upcoming Christmas holidays a festive gathering attended



by the teaching staff and all students.

The menu, created by executive chef Hector Espinoza, featured all seasonal favorites including roast turkey, glazed ham and Rugia's home made ayacas.

Pictured here the students, celebrating the season, at a most-enjoyable event over delicious food, in the Grand Caribbean Ballroom. □



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HUMAN HINTS

Doubt – Friend or Foe

Doubt is a natural part of effort. When you feel Doubt, it is helpful to examine it, thank it and release it. When you welcome your doubt and use it appropriately, it will become a powerful and unique tool at your disposal. If you don't use your own Doubt to your advantage, it will ultimately defeat you.

When you think about doubt, you think about potential obstacles to achieving your goal. It is necessary to examine the faults and weaknesses in any plan, and your Doubt helps hone the focus of your examination. Your Doubt comes from you. Everyone tells you what they think, and you naturally sift through the information, accepting or rejecting each piece as it comes.

Most people will tell you why your idea won't work or why you will never achieve your goals. As their arguments come, you either accept them as doubt or reject them as solved or not-applicable to you.

In other words, you latch onto only the Doubt that rings true within you. If it didn't ring true within you, you would have instantly dismissed it. Don't blame your doubt on other people. Accepting it as yours is the first step to using it to strengthen your efforts, and ultimately releasing it.

When doubt enters your mind, don't push it away in fear, use it to help you hone your vision. Focus on the specific reason that causes the Doubt.

What specific situation, person or thing threatens to block your success.

Something specific creates the Doubt within you. What specifically is it? "I can't reach my goal because ..." What specifically?

Now that you know the specific reason for your doubt, ask yourself what changes you can make that will reduce the probability of that specific thing getting in your way. When you know of a possible obstacle, you can plan for it.

You can think of ways to get around it before it ever occurs, and you can reduce the possibility of a specific obstacle crossing your path. This is how Doubt guides you to the weaker parts of your plan. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, so strengthening your weak links makes for a strong plan.

We resolve our doubt by Until Tomorrow...

taking action to avoid or minimize the specific thing that causes us Doubt. If we do not resolve our Doubt, we cannot release it. When we can't let go, Doubt can eventually prevent us from reaching our goals.

Analyze your Doubts. Imagine a solution to the specific obstacles that cause your uncertainty. Imagine how to avoid the obstacles completely.

If the obstacles seem endless, consider other directions that would flow more easily.

When used properly, Doubt can be a powerful tool. When it is not confronted and released, Doubt can devour our dreams. This can be great if we're on the wrong path, but painful nonetheless.

~Quentin Danziger

Quentin has over 20 years experience balancing what we refer to as the Real World, with science and spirit. He has held positions of responsibility and authority, received a Bachelor of Science in Engineering Physics from Colorado School of Mines, and has also studied many avenues of alternative thought.

HumanHints is the culmination of his knowledge, experience and practice. These free daily emails detail concrete, real-world techniques to consciously create any future you choose, while in the throes of daily life created by outdated modes of thought.

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La Cabana offers a Spectacular Holiday Party



ORANJESTAD – La Cabana Beach & Racquet Club offered a spectacular holiday party to its associates at the Renaissance Convention Center. Fully decorated with shimmering fish and sparkling blue and silver table center pieces the “Under the Sea” ambiance carried into the décor, providing the perfect backdrop for an elegant party emceed by Assistant General Manager Jessica Franken. Goza Gaita entertained at the beginning of the evening while Tsunami took over after dinner was served and filled

the dance floor to the wee hours. The Renaissance Convention Center served a welcome champagne cocktail upon arrival of guests, followed by a complete holiday buffet featuring Oyster Soup, a fresh salad bar with Seafood Tempura and Red Beet Potato Salad, Honey Glazed Leg of Ham with pineapple salsa, Grilled Chicken Breast with mango salsa and interesting sides, a carving station with Beef Strip Loin, Roasted Turkey and traditional trimmings followed by a stunning array of desserts, Bolo Pruin, Bolo di Pineapple,



Bolo di Chuculati and sliced tropical fruit.



Pictured here the associates having a great time, at the renaissance Convention Center party hosted by General Manager Joe Najjar and organized by his Human Resources department specialists. La Cabana Beach & Racquet Club offered a flat screen TV as a dour prize, raffled just prior to the annual award ceremony.



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The Bistro's menu offers everyone's favorites, but with a culinary Belgian twist. This might be an unusual

presentation, an awesome side dish, a stunning combination, a surprising regional dish or a dessert that takes you to heaven and back a few times. Good service and lots of smiles will surely make the Bistro one of your favorite places to go to. Open for coffee, lunch, drinks, dinner and cocktails.

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The Brazilian-style steakhouse also offers up a garden full of healthy eats on a lavish 40-item seasonal salad bar, giving dieters plenty to choose from to accompany the

slow-roasted meats. A selection of fresh lettuces and vegetables may be standard for most salad bars, but **Texas de Brazil's** version goes a gourmet twist further, treating the palate to additional items like marinated portabella mushrooms, sweet roasted bell peppers, hearts of palm, sundried tomatoes, imported cheeses—including fresh buffalo mozzarella—sushi, home-made soups, and much more.

The salad bar is included in the continuous service meal with unlimited choices from the grilled meats, but for vegetarians or the non-meat eaters, a special price is offered for just the salad bar. Of course, for those looking to splurge while on vacation, **Texas de Brazil** will gladly serve their garlic mashed potatoes, traditional fried plantains, and their world-famous parmesan cheese bread as part of the meal.

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Holiday dubs Network Latin America conference a success

DAWN BEACH--President of the Princess Juliana International Airport operating company (PJIAE) Eugene Holiday on Tuesday said the Network Latin America conference was a success. The two-day conference closed yesterday. The objectives of the conference were to create a forum for aviation exchange while showcasing St. Maarten's airport.

Network Latin America is organized annually by Airline Business magazine, the leading strategic title for airline executives, with a global reach of 25,000 senior readers. Some 178 delegates attended, representing various companies namely airlines, airports, handling companies and other aviation-related businesses. There were 330

one-to-one meetings between airlines and airports. Over the two days, PJIAE executives, led by Marketing Manager Lucrecia Lynch-Matinburgh, had 12 meetings with different airlines. The highlight of the conference was a panel discussion that had an overall message of sustainability of air service that goes hand in hand with creativity and efficiency. Major topics included keeping airline costs in check from an airport perspective, creative marketing, fostering partnerships and developing bilateral agreements.

"It is important to mention that most delegates present expect passenger growth to resume in 2010 and vary between 0 to 5 per cent," Holiday said. Editor of Airline Business magazine Mark Pilling said the response from delegates was very positive. Delegates, he added, were very impressed with their St. Maarten experience. He said he had no doubt that the conference and the relationships forged there, which he likened to a relationship building exercise, will result in new airline service for the island in six to 24 months.

Holiday echoed those statements by saying although PJIA has fostered similar relationships by attending related events, "there is nothing better than meeting some of the people in St. Maarten. Now they know what St. Maarten offers. Seeing it makes a major difference. "Latin America, from a route development perspective, is the new frontier for St. Maarten. I am totally convinced, based on discussions we had here, that we will be seeing direct flights coming out of Latin America to St. Maarten in short time," he said. □

More needed

While St. Maarten can rightfully be proud today as the brand-new biggest cruise ship of the world Oasis of the Seas docks alongside the also new second cruise pier in Great Bay, news coming from Simpson Bay Lagoon was less encouraging. An oil spill suspected to be the result of inappropriate diesel bunkering facilities affected at least one restaurant and its patrons. But it's more than that, of course. The spectacular development of the local marine industry over the last decade or so undoubtedly already has placed a great environmental burden on the lagoon and these kinds of mishaps aren't exactly helpful in this regard.

Just the other day the adjustment of the bridge and harbour fees made possible by placing Simpson Bay Authority Lagoon Corporation (SLAC) under the Harbour Holding Group of Companies was welcomed in this same column. It was argued that those fees had become prohibitive and had led to a downturn in the local yachting business after years of impressive growth. But if the plan is to revive this sector and "recapture" the lost part of the market, the environmental practices involved will have to be watched more closely and adapted where necessary. Otherwise, the development in this sector in the long run won't be sustainable and this entire "renewed effort" to stimulate it may prove in vain.

While the help of yacht owners in tackling the fuel spill to the best of their ability is certainly appreciated, it appears structural measures need to be taken to prevent such environmentally damaging mishaps in the first place and to deal with them in a more professional manner, such as by placing an oil boom once they occur. Whether that requires investments on the part of the fuel distributor and/or yacht and marina owners is a matter for experts to decide, but judging from the complaint it happens often enough to conclude that something needs to be done. □



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Parliament supports motion on Brooks Tower Accord

THE HAGUE--The Dutch Parliament on Tuesday unanimously voted for the Brooks Tower Accord motion of Christian Democratic Party CDA. The largest coalition partner had submitted the motion early Thursday morning last week during the handling of the 2010 budget of Kingdom Relations.

The motion states that "illegal residency and facilitating of such needs to be combated fiercely and should not be rewarded with a residency permit." The motion requests the Dutch Government to

engage in talks with the Central Government and the Government of Aruba about illegal residency and the execution of the Brooks Tower Accord.

The motion spoke about "intensifying the combating of illegal residency and expulsion of foreigners, the control of executing regulations and the consequences that these legalising operations may have for the Netherlands, in light of the Safety Plan Netherlands Antilles and the National Security Plan Aruba."

During last week's handling

of the budget, State Secretary of Kingdom Relations Ank Bijleveld-Schouten said that she would be addressing the issue of the Brooks Tower Accord in the Political Steering Group meeting that she has with the Central Government and the island territories in St. Maarten on Wednesday.

Last week it was already clear that the motion, presented by CDA Member of Parliament (MP) Bas Jan van Bochove would receive broad support. The motion was co-signed by Democrats D66, Labour Party PvdA, Socialist Party

(SP), liberal democratic VVD party, Christian Union (CU) and the reformed SGP party. On Tuesday, all 150 Members of Parliament voted for the motion.

A second motion on the Brooks Tower Accord, presented by MP Hero Brinkman of the Party for Freedom PVV, didn't make it. Only PVV, VVD and the one-member faction of Rita Verdonk voted in favour of PVV's motion which called on the Dutch Government to have the "general pardon" arrangement annulled. The motion also aimed at preventing undocumented persons from obtaining a Dutch passport. Parliament also voted against a motion submitted by MP Johan Remkes of the VVD to move up the target date of October 10, 2010 as long as the police organisation of countries Curaçao and St. Maarten weren't functioning optimally.

VVD's second motion to maintain the Detective Cooperation Team RST until the new police forces on the islands have realised an effective cooperation did receive the support from the majority in Parliament.

A third motion presented by VVD also received the majority support. In that motion, the Dutch Government is asked to start the procedure to amend the Dutch Constitution to facilitate the integration of the BES islands, Bonaire, Saba and St. Eustatius in the Dutch Constellation as "public entities."

A motion submitted by MP Ronald van Raak of the Socialist Party on lucrative contracts for former Antillean politicians received broad support as well. The

motion requests the Dutch Government to submit an overview of these contracts to Parliament. The reason for the motion was the case of a former St. Maarten civil servant who enjoyed a royal salary plus extras working in the Netherlands.

Parliament rejected a motion by the PVV to defer the constitutional process until after the Bonaire referendum. Another motion by PVV calling for an investigation into corruption practices by Bonaire politicians didn't make it either.

The voting on a motion to legalise same sex marriages in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba by October 10, 2010 was deferred by one week. Voting was postponed following last minute efforts by MP John Leerdam of the Labour Party to convince his colleagues Ineke van Gent and Femke Halsema of the green left party GroenLinks to amend the motion's text.

Leerdam, supported by his colleague Alexander Pechtold of D66, agreed that homosexuals and lesbians in the entire Kingdom should be able to get married, but considered the text of the motion "too broad" and "too far-reaching." It was decided to hold off on the voting so parties can reach an accord on the motion's text. Support of the Labour Party is essential in order for the motion to be passed.

Remkes of the VVD, who co-signed the GroenLinks motion, said it was "unacceptable" that homosexuals in the BES islands, the Caribbean part of the Netherlands, would not have the same rights as in the Netherlands. □

Labega says concerns at conference need attention

DAWN BEACH--Although she thinks the Network Latin America conference was a success and served its purpose, Head of the St. Maarten Tourist Bureau Regina Labega opined that there were challenges raised at the conference that St. Maarten needs to address when trying to attract low cost carriers in particular. The key session at the conference was a panel discussion moderated by former LIAT executive Mark Darby and included President of the Princess Juliana Airport operating company (PJIAE) Eugene Holiday, Senior Director of Strategic Planning at AirTran John Kirby and M. Moreira, Planning and Statistics Director at GOL Airlines.

Labega said one concern mentioned during the discussion is the aircraft turnaround time at the Princess Juliana International Airport (PJIA). The panellist from GOL said the optimal turnaround time should be 35 minutes maximum and anything more is considered inefficient.

Apparently several operators from St. Maarten

who were present at the conference, including Holiday, did not see this time as realistic for St. Maarten considering immigration clearance etc. Labega said while all had valid points, "minimizing our turnaround time is our challenge as we try to attract these carriers."

The representatives of the low cost carriers also mentioned PJIA reducing its operational costs and fees to a minimum for low cost carriers and US pre-clearance such as Aruba among other things. AirTran, which operates out of Orlando, is servicing Aruba in part because the destination is popular and aggressively marketed.

Mark Peilling, Editor of Airline Business magazine, the organiser of the conference, said delegates at the conference also expressed concerns about the high level of taxation (departure taxes) at PJIA. He said while he doesn't think this will be a reason to hamper future service, airlines are concerned about the extra cost that passengers have to bear as compared to other destinations in the region □



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Injunction filed in bid to halt Oyster Bay pollution

OYSTER POND--Oyster Pond Great House NV Marina and Laissez Faire NV filed an injunction Tuesday afternoon against Pearl Development NV and Oyster Bay Club NV in a bid to halt the pollution of Oyster Pond with running sewage water.

Bay Club are the owners of Oyster Bay Beach Resort. According to the Subdivision Plan for this area, which was issued in December 1996, each unit of this timeshare hotel should be connected to a sewage treatment plant.

This plant should include "a drainage filter or provision for re-use of treated effluent, all of which should be located entirely on the property, and should not cause any hindrance to adjacent properties and no effluent is allowed to run into the Oyster Pond or the sea," it can be read from official subdivision plan as submitted by plaintiffs to the Court of First Instance.

Attorney-at-law Jairo Bloem submitted these and other documents to the Court late Tuesday afternoon, in what he described as a "very important case for the environment of the island."

The defendants installed a septic plant to process waste

water, but according to the plaintiffs, who are operating a marina in Oyster Bay and a guesthouse on Oyster Bay Beach, the resort never received a permit under the Nuisance Act (Hinderwetvergunning) for these operations.

"Even more, the request [for such a license] would have been turned down," it is stated in the plaintiffs' petition to the Court of First Instance.

According to the plaintiffs, wastewater is being discharged into Oyster Bay "daily, and throughout the day" via a pipe which is connected to the Beach Resort's septic plant.

The plaintiffs claim that the wastewater that is running from a camouflaged pipe is seriously damaging the water quality in Oyster Bay, damaging the mangroves in the area.

In September, experts from Energy Automation in Curaçao took samples of the water that came running out of the pipe.

Bloem described the laboratory test results of these samples as being "astonishing."

"It has been proven that the waste water is not or hardly treated. It is vulgarly said 'faeces water' that is draining and polluting the bay."

According to the plaintiffs this violation of the Nuisance Act constitutes a tort act, which should be rectified by the court.

Plaintiffs requested the court to order Oyster Bay Beach Resort to cease the use of its wastewater treatment plant until they have received a permit for it, and to halt the dumping of wastewater into Oyster Bay.

In case of non-compliance, the plaintiffs asked the court to also impose a US \$50,000 penalty on a daily basis for each of the abovementioned violations.

It is not yet known when the case will be heard in court. □

Duncan: Pace in setting up 'dependencies' far too slow

PHILIPSBURG--St. Maarten is not happy with the snail's pace at which the process is moving for the setting up of branches of Central Government ministries and departments in St. Maarten.

Constitutional Affairs Minister Roland Duncan, who on Tuesday met with the Executive Council to discuss the assistance to be provided by the Central Government including the transfer of tasks of the several Ministries and Central Government authorities to St. Maarten, said the island representatives expressed their dissatisfaction with the pace of the process.

He said despite an agreement to expedite things, the process is not moving fast enough.

"St. Maarten is unhappy about the.... slowness of the process and I have advised them to voice their opinion as soon as they can. I have meetings [Tuesday afternoon] and [Wednesday] and it's a great opportunity for St. Maarten to voice its displeasure and to share ideas and suggestions. The process is moving, but not as fast as St. Maarten wishes."

He argued that most of the workers carrying out Central Government tasks are based in Curaçao and while St. Maarten needs to hire more people, it also needs funds to do so. "St. Maarten needs to employ people. How do you do that without sufficient funds; so we need funds. We also need to deal with place and location."

On the issue of office space, Duncan said the Central Government has several options such as the Vineyard Building and the Brooks Tower building, which it can use to start setting up certain departments.

"Ministers are not reacting fast enough to set up the dependencies and they have certain conditions that are not in line with the agreements that were made," Duncan said in giving reasons for the slowness of the process.

"Or they are saying that they don't have enough money and St. Maarten is required to come up with people that it can't hire because we don't have the money. Many issues are popping up that need to be dealt with."

The Minister said he will press for the process to move apace. He plans to broach the issue with the Council of Ministers - a task that he foresees will be difficult.

"From the Central Government end, I will ensure that the law on the decentralization of tasks is effective by January 1, but as of January, St. Maarten will [be able to say] give me," he said referring to the Central Government departments. □

Citizens discouraged over silence about Mullet Bay

PHILIPSBURG--There has been no word about the Mullet Bay saga since leader of Government Commissioner William Marlin indicated that he would forward a letter to owner of SunResorts' Hushang Ansary requesting that he demolish the derelict buildings at Mullet Bay.

There has been no indication from government if such a correspondence has been sent and efforts to find out have proved futile.

The concerned citizens who started a petition to get Rhine Road fixed and the buildings at Mullet Bay demolished said they are disheartened that the Executive Council has not responded to the November 19 submittal of 634 petition signatures on a petition or letters of concern from Atlantis Casino, St. Maarten Pride, St. Maarten Hospitality and Trade Association (SHTA) and Blue Mall Residences.

President and CEO of the Maho Group Saro Spadaro also supported the petition and said the embarrassment of Mullet Bay's poor

appearance must be addressed and brought to a decisive close.

The citizens added that it is discouraging that the people of St. Maarten continue to be treated like they do not matter. Politicians they added, continue to say the right things in the media but do not practice what they preach. □





FILE - In this Dec. 4, 2009 file photo, Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. Stock futures are indicating a higher open on Wall Street Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2009, bouncing back from the previous day's losses as the dollar resumes its decline.

(AP Photo/Richard Drew, file)

Stocks climb as investors shrug off debt concerns

By SARA LEPRO
and TIM PARADIS,
AP Business Writers

NEW YORK — Investors set aside some concerns about mounting debt levels around the world and looked for bargains after a two-day slide in stocks.

Stocks turned higher late Wednesday after a day of back-and-forth trading. Investors have been cautious about rising government debt levels in Spain, Greece and other countries.

The Dow Jones industrial average rose 51 points to regain about half of what it lost a day earlier.

Investors spent much of the day looking for safety following a decision by credit rating agency Standard & Poor's to reduce the outlook on Spain's debt rating Wednesday.

S&P's move came a day after another agency lowered its credit rating on Greece's government. Investors have been watchful for other signs of problems with global debt ever since a state-run company in Dubai shocked investors two weeks ago by asking its creditors for a debt reprieve.

Meanwhile, stocks again followed moves in the dollar, as they have for months. When it falls, the dollar makes commodities cheaper for foreign buyers and increase profits for U.S. companies that do business outside the U.S.

The dollar has steadied this week against other major currencies, interrupting a steady drop since March. The greenback has fallen as investors take advantage of cheap financing to invest in riskier, higher-yielding assets like stocks and commodities. Signs that the economy is improving have cut into demand for safe-haven investments.

In recent weeks, however, investors have been shuttling between buying stocks and hoarding cash as they try to lock in some of the big gains they've amassed in stocks since a rally started in March. As the end of the year approaches, many investors have been building up defensive investments like Treasuries. The uncertain tone in the market, combined with light trading volume, has made for choppy trading, which analysts expect to continue through the rest of the year. □

Administration extends \$700B bailout until Oct.

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER,
AP Economics Writers

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration has extended the \$700 billion financial bailout program until October, setting up a struggle between Democrats who favor using some of the leftover money to help generate jobs and Republicans who say it should be used to shrink soaring budget deficits.

The administration insists the bailout fund is still needed to prevent further turmoil in the banking system. In announcing the decision Wednesday, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said extending the program also will help homeowners struggling to avoid losing homes to foreclosures and small businesses having trouble getting loans.

The administration is now projecting the losses to the government from the bailout program will be around \$141 billion — \$200 billion less than it estimated two months ago.

President Barack Obama said the freed-up money can help reduce the record-high federal budget deficit and “invest in job creation on Main Street rather than Wall Street.”

Obama spoke to reporters after a meeting with congressional leaders aimed at providing momentum for a new jobs program he outlined Tuesday. That effort seeks to combat the nation's 10 percent unemployment rate by providing tax breaks to encourage companies to hire new workers, increase bank lending to small businesses and provide a fresh round of infrastructure spending.

The administration has not provided details on the size of the new spending package. But Democratic leaders suggested it could cost between \$75 billion and \$150 billion.

Democrats initially hoped



US Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, seen here in October 2009, said Wednesday he was extending the authority of a 700-billion-dollar financial bailout to October 2010 even though the program would cost less than expected.

(AFP/File/Tim Sloan)

to pass Obama's proposals this month. But the proposals likely will slip until early January, given opposition from Republicans and the to-do list already facing Congress as it struggles to finish business before Christmas.

Both the administration and Democratic leaders have indicated they want to divert some of the unspent bailout funds to a jobs program. Their goal is to refashion a hugely unpopular program viewed by voters as a taxpayer-funded bailout for big Wall Street firms that then reaped millions of dollars in lavish bonuses. Republicans vowed to keep trying to close down the rescue program by the end of this month. They said any leftover funds should be devoted exclusively to curbing the country's soaring budget deficits. “The Obama administration just can't seem to let go of the \$700 billion in ‘walking around money’ taxpayers were forced to put on the line to bailout Wall Street last year,” said Rep. Jeb Hensarling, R-Texas.

Republicans also criticized Treasury for using the Troubled Asset Relief Program as a slush fund to support programs that Congress never intended — including bailouts of automakers and failing

insurance giant American International Group Inc.

“American taxpayers have had enough of open-ended bailouts that have left them stuck with trillions of dollars in new debt,” House Republican Leader John Boehner, R-Ohio, said Wednesday. “TARP should be shut down by the end of the year. It's time to get the government out of the bailout business.”

Geithner contended that the bailout program helped avert a worse financial outcome. Financial conditions have improved, and the economy has finally pulled out of a deep tailspin and is starting to grow again.

Repayments from banks who received TARP support will soon total \$116 billion, including \$45 billion from Bank of America Corp.

The government expects up to \$175 billion in repayments from rescued companies by the end of next year, he said.

The TARP was passed during the height of the financial crisis in October 2008 and was scheduled to expire at the end of this year. In his notification to Congress, Geithner said it will be extended until Oct. 3, 2010, “to respond to an immediate and substantial threat to the economy stemming from financial instability.” □



FILE - In this Aug. 3, 2006 file photo, actor Nicolas Cage arrives at the world premiere of the film 'World Trade Center', in New York.

(AP Photo/Stephen Chernin, file)

Nicolas Cage's ex-girlfriend sues for millions

By ANTHONY MCCARTNEY,
Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES — Nicolas Cage's ex-girlfriend is suing the actor and his former business manager, claiming she is owed more than \$13 million and a house the actor promised her. Christina Fulton, who is the mother of Cage's adult son, Weston, sued the Oscar-winner in Los Angeles on Tuesday. She claims Cage promised her a home in Los Angeles' Hancock Park neighborhood, but that she has now been ordered to leave the property. Fulton is seeking the title and rights to the house as well as money for a series of debts she claims were caused by Cage's former business manager, Samuel J. Levin.

Cage's attorney, Marty Singer, called Fulton's claims against the actor absurd and said Cage has given her far more than the \$6,000 per month he was required to pay her under a court order. Cage has paid \$3 million per year on behalf of Fulton in recent years, he said.

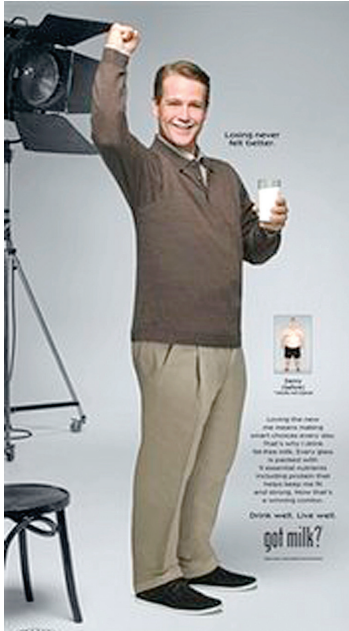
"From Nic's standpoint, this is really a case of 'No good deed goes unpunished,'" Singer said.

He noted that many of the claims are leveled against Levin, whose attorney, Joseph Schleimer, did not respond to a phone message seeking comment on Wednesday.

Fulton's lawsuit is the latest in a string of financial woes for Cage, who stated in a \$20 million lawsuit against Levin that he is being forced to sell properties around the world to make up for financial mismanagement. The Internal Revenue Service has filed more than \$6.6 million in tax liens against the actor this year, records show.

Levin has countersued Cage, claiming the star owes him money and failed to heed his advice to curb his lavish spending habits. Fulton and Cage's son was born in 1990, and the couple split about four years later, her lawsuit states. □

'Biggest Loser' sheds history-making 239 pounds



In this image released by Milk Processor Education Program on Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2009, Danny Cahill, a 40-year-old land surveyor and musician from Broken Arrow, Okla., and winner of the weight loss challenge program, 'The Biggest Loser,' is shown in the latest 'Got Milk' ad. Cahill, who went from 430 pounds to 191 pounds, losing 55.58 percent of his body weight, was crowned champion during the season eight finale on Tuesday, Dec. 8.

(AP Photo/Milk Processor Education Program)

NEW YORK — The latest winner of NBC's "The Biggest Loser" is the biggest loser in the show's history.

Danny Cahill, a 40-year-old land surveyor and musician from Broken Arrow, Okla., lost 239 pounds to win the \$250,000 grand prize.

Cahill went from 430 pounds to 191 pounds, losing 55.58 percent of his body weight in six months and three weeks — and breaking the record for the most weight lost by any contestant. The Nielsen Co. said that with 13.4 million viewers, the season eight finale of "The Biggest Loser" on Tuesday night had the show's biggest audience in four years. Erik Chopin, who won in 2006, held the previous record, dropping 214 pounds. He went from 407 pounds to 193 pounds.

In an interview Wednesday on the "Today" show, Cahill said his family motivated him to change his lifestyle. □



FILE - This is a May 4, 2009, file photo showing New England Patriots' Tom Brady and his wife, model Gisele Bündchen arriving at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute Gala in New York.

(AP Photo/Evan Agostini, File)

Supermodel Bündchen and QB Tom Brady have baby boy

By HOWARD ULMAN,
AP Sports Writer

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady and supermodel Gisele Bündchen have welcomed a baby boy.

Brady announced the birth Wednesday. He said the boy was born Tuesday and that he and Bündchen had not chosen a name. He called it "a wonderful experience in my life."

"Everyone's great," Brady said. "I didn't get much sleep." Brady also has a 2-year-old son, Jack, with actress Bridget Moynahan. Bündchen is a mother for the first time. The birth was first reported by People.com.

Brady and Bündchen were married in February in Los Angeles in a small ceremony. In April, they held another wedding ceremony in Costa Rica for friends and family.

On Wednesday, Brady showed up 16 minutes late for his weekly media availability. Asked what was new, he said, "a normal week," and smiled.

The Patriots have lost three of their last four games to drop to 7-5. They lead the AFC East by one game and play at home Sunday against the Carolina Panthers. Brady said it was important for him to come to work Wednesday.

"I owe it to the guys in the locker room to really focus on what I need to do for this team," he said, "and put all these emotions aside and kind of come in here with a great sense of determination on what we have to do as a team. So, as a captain and a leader of this team, the last thing they need from me is to be really not focused on the job at hand. There's plenty of things for me to really be doing here this week." □

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WHO: Smoking kills 5 million every year

By MARIA CHENG,
AP Medical Writer

LONDON – Tobacco use kills at least 5 million people every year, a figure that could rise if countries don't take stronger measures to combat smoking, the World Health Organization said Wednesday.

In a new report on tobacco use and control, the U.N. agency said nearly 95 percent of the global population is unprotected by laws banning smoking. WHO said secondhand smoking kills about 600,000 people every year.

The report describes countries' various strategies to curb smoking, including protecting people from smoke, enforcing bans on tobacco advertising, and raising taxes on tobacco products. Those were included in a package of six strategies WHO unveiled last year, but less than 10 percent of the world's population is covered by any single measure.

"People need more than to be told that tobacco is bad for human health," said Douglas Bettcher, director of WHO's Tobacco-Free Initiative. "They need their governments to implement the WHO Framework Convention."

Most of WHO's anti-tobacco efforts are centered on the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, an international treaty ratified by nearly 170 countries in 2003. The convention theoretically obliges countries to take action to reduce tobacco use, though it is unclear if

they can be punished for not taking adequate measures, since they can simply withdraw from the treaty.

Other experts questioned how effective WHO's strategies were.

"It's like the well-intentioned blind leading the blind," said Patrick Basham, director of the Democracy Institute, a London and Washington-based think tank. He said WHO's policies were based more on hope than evidence.

Basham said measures like increasing taxes on tobacco products and banning advertising don't address the root causes of why people smoke. Smoking levels naturally drop off — as they have in Western countries — when populations become richer and better-educated.

Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death and WHO estimates that, unless countries take drastic action, tobacco could kill about 8 million people every year by 2030, mostly in developing countries.

Basham said officials should focus on anti-poverty measures to stem the smoking problem, though that is beyond WHO's mandate as a health agency.

"The cynical view is that the anti-tobacco lobby has itself now become an industry and we will never be able to do enough to stop smoking," Basham said. "Tobacco use will change, but it has very little to do with the kinds of things WHO is promoting." □



The US state of Virginia is poised to ban smoking in most restaurants and bars as of midnight on Tuesday, turning the page on 400 years of history that is tightly tied to tobacco.

(AFP/File/Frederick Florin)



From left, U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry, Deputy Secretary of State Jacob Lew and U.S. Central Commander Gen. David Petraeus prepare to testify on Capitol Hill in Washington, Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2009, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on Afghanistan.

Associated Press

General says U.S. to boost counterterrorism effort

PAULINE JELINEK
ROBERT BURNS

Associated Press Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — The rapid U.S. buildup in the Afghan war will include more terrorist-hunting forces to chase down militants deemed too extreme to change sides, a top U.S. general disclosed on Wednesday.

“There’s no question you’ve got to kill or capture those bad guys that are not reconcilable,” Gen. David Petraeus, the chief of U.S. Central Command, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. “And we are intending to do that.” In his first congressional testimony on President Barack Obama’s announced plan to send another 30,000 troops to Afghanistan, Petraeus also cautioned that progress against the insurgency in Afghanistan probably will be slower than during the build up of U.S. forces in Iraq two years ago, and the war will be “harder before it gets easier.”

Petraeus said that in addition to an effort to “reintegrate” Taliban and other insurgents into mainstream Afghan society, there will be a harder push to eliminate the most hardcore extremists. “In fact, we actually will be increasing our counterterrorist component of the overall strategy,” Petraeus said. He provided

no details beyond saying that additional “national mission force elements” would be sent to Afghanistan next spring.

Petraeus appeared to be referring to classified units such as the Army’s Delta Force that specialize in counterterrorism and that have been used extensively in both Iraq and Afghanistan. General Stanley McChrystal, who now oversees the Afghan war and will testify tomorrow before a House committee, previously headed up those units inside the war-torn country.

Those extra forces would conduct counterinsurgency operations against the Taliban and accelerate the training of Afghan soldiers and police. The first of those forces are to begin heading to Afghanistan this month.

Much of Wednesday’s hearing focused on the link between instability in Afghanistan and the presence of Taliban, al-Qaida and other extremist groups in neighboring Pakistan.

Sen. Richard Lugar, the top Republican on the committee, said he’s confident allied forces will improve security in Afghanistan, but that the biggest question is whether that will help root out Taliban and al-Qaida havens across the border in Pakistan.

Continued on Next Page

5 missing Americans investigated for terror links

DEVLIN BARRETT
PAMELA HESS

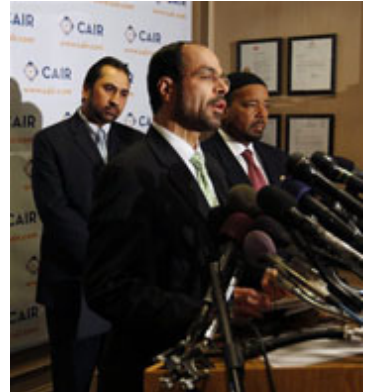
Associated Press Writers

WASHINGTON (AP)

— Five young Americans captured in Pakistan are under investigation for possible links to organized terror groups after their families found a disturbing farewell video the missing men left behind showing scenes of war and casualties and saying Muslims must be defended. Frantic relatives and worried FBI agents have been searching for the five men for more than a week, since their disappearance in late November.

The missing men, ranging in age from 19 to 25, have family roots in the northern Virginia and Washington, D.C., area.

Continued on Page B3



Nihad Awad, national executive director for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, speaks at a news conference in Washington, Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2009, regarding the arrest in Pakistan of five missing American young men. Behind him is Haris Tarin, Washington director for the Muslim Public Affairs Council, left, and Imam Mahdi Bray, executive director of the Muslim American Society Freedom, right.

Associated Press



Israeli right wing activists hold signs during a rally outside the Prime Minister’s residence against the government’s decision to freeze construction in West Bank Jewish settlements, in Jerusalem, Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2009.

Associated Press

Settlers protest in West Bank against building ban

ARON HELLER

Associated Press Writer

JERUSALEM (AP) — About 10,000 West Bank settlers and their backers filled part of downtown Jerusalem Wednesday, listening to fiery speeches, dancing in circles and pledging to defy a building ban imposed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Continued on Page B7



U.S. Central Command commanding Gen. David Petraeus testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington, Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2009, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on Afghanistan.

Associated Press

COUNTERTERRORISM

Continued from Page B1

"The president has said that the United States did not choose this war, and he is correct," he said. "But with these troop

deployments to Afghanistan, we are choosing the battlefield where we will concentrate most of our available military resources."

"The risk is that we will expend

tens of Break Breaks of dollars fighting in a strategically less important Afghanistan, while Taliban and al-Qaida leaders become increasingly secure in Pakistan," Lugar said.

Committee Chairman John Kerry agreed. "Pakistan is in many ways the core of our challenge," said the Democrat. He praised Pakistan's military for taking on Pakistani insurgents in offensives of recent months. "Now we are looking for Pakistan to also take on the Afghan Taliban," al-Qaida and other insurgents in their territory, Kerry added. Pakistan's stepped-up efforts have been the most effective it has undertaken against internal extremists, Petraeus said. That, he said, is "an important step forward" and does help U.S.

efforts to degrade extremist groups in the border region and to defeat the main U.S. target: al-Qaida.

There are limits to how much the Pakistani government can do, however, Petraeus said.

"You know, they say that you can only stick so many short sticks into so many hornets' nests at one time," he said.

In Afghanistan, Petraeus forecast an increase in bloodshed next summer. He cited a combination of increased U.S. and NATO military operations against the Taliban and increased turmoil resulting from expected Afghan government actions to combat corruption by replacing "malign actors" within the government.

Petraeus, who executed the

Iraq surge in 2007, told the committee that he supports Obama's revamped strategy but he did not explicitly predict that it will succeed.

He called success "attainable" and forecast "important progress" over the coming 18 months. But in his less-than-rosy assessment, he called Afghanistan "no more hopeless than Iraq" when he got there in early 2007.

Petraeus is commanding general of U.S. Central Command, which has responsibility for overseeing US military activities in Central Asia, including Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as the Middle East. He appeared with the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, Karl Eikenberry. □

Lawmakers agree to subpoena WH gate-crashers

By EILEEN SULLIVAN, Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Congress authorized subpoenas Wednesday for the White House gate-crashers to testify about how the couple got into a state dinner without an invitation.

Lawmakers on the House Homeland Security Committee voted Wednesday to compel the attention-hungry couple to answer questions about the Nov. 24 incident.

The couple, Tareq and Michaela Salah, have said they will invoke their Fifth Amendment right to refuse to answer questions.

Secret Service Director Mark Sullivan has said normal security protocols weren't followed and three uniformed Secret Service officers have been placed on administrative leave.

While the committee authorized subpoenas for the Salahs, it would not accept its top Republican's proposal to subpoena White House social secretary Desiree Rogers.

"I believe if we're going to get a full picture of what happened that evening, we have to have Desiree Rogers here," Rep.

Peter King, R-N.Y. said. King said he is willing to work with the White House to come up with a way for Rogers to answer questions about the incident.

The Secret Service and the White House social office together developed the security plan for the state dinner honoring the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Committee chairman Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., has been reluctant to subpoena Rogers — an Obama political appointee — because he maintains the Secret Service is responsible for security.

The Salahs said through their lawyer on Tuesday that the House Homeland Security Committee has drawn premature conclusions about the state dinner incident.

The Salahs have gone on national television and said they received an invitation to the dinner. But copies of e-mails they cited to buttress that claim show no such invitation was made.

The Salahs say they are cooperating with the Secret Service's criminal investigation.

Tareq Salah has resigned from

his position on the Virginia Tourism Authority Board.

Virginia's Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is investigating a charitable polo event the Salahs sponsor.

In his resignation e-mail Monday to Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine and president of the tourism group Alisa Bailey, Tareq Salah wrote, "unfortunate negative and tabloid type media" has made him a distraction to the tourism panel.

FILE - In this Tuesday, Nov. 24, 2009 file photo, Michaela and Tareq Salah, right, arrive at a State Dinner hosted by President Barack Obama for Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at the White House in Washington. The couple who crashed President Barack Obama's first state dinner may be subpoenaed to appear before a House committee looking into the security breach. The Homeland Security Committee plans to vote Wednesday Dec. 9, 2009, on whether to subpoena reality TV hopefuls Michaela and Tareq Salah to testify.

(AP Photo/Gerald Herbert, file)



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MISSING AMERICANS Continued from Page B1

One, Ramy Zamzam, is a dental student at Howard University.

Two U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the case, said the five are believed to be under arrest in Pakistan.

In the aftermath of charges having been filed against a man in Chicago, Illinois having been accused of plotting international terror, the case is another worrisome sign that Americans might be recruited within the United States to enlist in terror networks.

Leaders of an Islamic American group said the families of the five men asked the FBI for help and were particularly disturbed to see the video message.

"One person appeared in that video and they made references to the ongoing conflict in the world, and that young Muslims have to do something," said Nihad Awad, of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, or CAIR.

"The video's about 11 minutes, and it's like a farewell. And they did not specify what they would be doing. But just hearing and seeing videos similar on the Internet, it just made me uncomfortable," Awad said. The video has not been made public.

Before they left, they did not seem to have become militant, a local imam said. "From all of our interviews, there was no sign they were outwardly radicalized," said Imam Johari Abdul-Malik. In Pakistan, police officer Tahir Gujjar said five Americans were picked up in a raid on a house in Sarghoda in the eastern province of Punjab. He

did not identify them, but said three are of Pakistani descent, one is of Egyptian descent and the other has Yemeni heritage.

S.M. Imran Gardezi, press minister at the Pakistani Embassy in Washington, said the men "are under arrest in Pakistan. The investigation is to see whether they had any links to any extremist groups." No charges have been filed.

Pakistani regional police chief Mian Javed Islam told The Associated Press that the men spent the past few days in the city of Sarghoda, which is near an air base about 125 miles (200 kilometers) south of the capital, Islamabad.

U.S. Embassy spokesman Rick Snelsire said officials there were aware of the reported arrests but could not confirm them.

Pakistan has many militant groups based in its territory and the United States has been pressing the government to crack down on extremism. Al-Qaida and Taliban militants are believed to be hiding in lawless tribal areas near the Afghan border.

In Washington, a spokeswoman for the FBI's local office said agents have been trying to help find the men.

"The FBI is working with the families and local law enforcement to investigate the missing students and is aware of the individuals arrested in Pakistan," said the spokeswoman, Katherine Schweit. "We are working with Pakistan authorities to determine their identities and the nature of their business there if indeed these are the students who had gone missing."

She said the investigation continues, declining to



Ibrahim Hooper, left, spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, speaks at a news conference regarding the arrest in Pakistan of five missing young men in Washington, Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2009. Behind him are CAIR national executive director Nihad Awad, center, and Imam Mahdi Bray, executive director of the Muslim American Society Freedom, right.

Associated Press

comment further.

According to officials at CAIR, the five left the country at the end of November without telling their families.

After the young men left, at least one phoned his family still claiming to be in the United States, but the caller ID information suggested they were overseas.

The families, members of the local Muslim community, took their concerns to CAIR, which put them in touch with the FBI and got them a lawyer, the group said.

A Howard University spokesman confirmed Zamzam was a student there but declined further comment.

Samirah Ali, president of Howard University's Muslim Student Association, said the FBI contacted her last week about Zamzam, and told her he had been missing for a week.

Ali said she has known Zamzam for three years and never suspected he would

be involved in radical activities.

"He's a very nice guy, very cordial, very friendly," Ali

said, adding that he has a bubbly personality. "It really caught me off guard." □

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Obama praises new health care compromise



From left, Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., and Sen. Blanche Lincoln, D-Ark. take part in a health care news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington, Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2009.

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama as well as Democratic liberals and moderates all found something to like Wednesday in an emerging compromise to expand the role of government in the nation's health care system, raising hopes inside

the party that passage of legislation might finally be within reach after a struggle lasting decades.

The same plan drew critics, though — and the threat of more once closely held details of the plan became widely known.

Obama hailed “a creative new framework that I believe will help pave the way for final passage of legislation and a historic achievement for the American people. I support this effort, especially since it's aimed at increasing choice and competition and lowering cost,” he said.

The president has made health care reform the top domestic priority of his first term in office and is anxious to get a bill passed soon so the issue does not become embroiled in next year's political campaigns leading up to November elections. Obama's Democrats have majorities in both houses of Congress that they are anxious to protect.

Even if the compromise plan were to pass in the Senate, it remained very uncertain that the House of Representatives, which has already passed a version of the bill, would agree to the Senate compromise in bicameral negotiations to meld the two bills.

The Senate is in its second week of debate on the 10-year, nearly \$1 trillion legislation that would dramatically remake the U.S. health care system and extend coverage to millions. Tens of millions of Americans lack health insurance or are underinsured, either because their employers do not provide it or they are out of work. The United States is the only developed industrialized nation that does not have a comprehensive national health care plan. A provision in the Senate bill opening Medicare to uninsured Americans between the ages of 55 and 64 drew praise from some liberals. Medicare is the government-run health care program for the elderly that starts at 65. Howard Dean, the former Democratic party chairman and an advocate of a government-run insurance option, told CBS, “Using Medicare makes more sense than reinventing more bureaucracy.” The government-run option would be jettisoned under the tentative agreement reached by Senate Democratic liberals and moderates and announced Tuesday night. In its place

would be the expansion of Medicare, as well as new nationwide private plans to be run by the same agency that oversees the system that lawmakers use for themselves and their families.

The House bill contains the government-run option.

Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Democrat, described the Senate agreement as a significant step forward in the struggle to round up the votes to pass legislation.

That would leave only a final compromise before legislation could go to Obama for his signature. Congress has spent months trying to deliver a bill to the White House by Dec. 25 that would expand health care coverage, ban insurance companies from denying coverage on the basis of pre-existing medical conditions, and generally reduce the skyrocketing growth of medical spending nationwide. Sen. Joe Lieberman, an independent who has vowed to fight any government-run insurance option, issued a statement saying he was “encouraged by the progress toward a consensus.”

Lieberman's vote is one of 60 Democrats would need to enact the legislation in the 100-member Senate over unanimous 40-member Republican opposition, and he and Sen. Ben Nelson, a Democrat, are viewed as among the shakiest supporters of the bill. □

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Storm dumps snow on Midwest, bitter cold to follow

By LUKE MEREDITH
Associated Press Writer

DES MOINES, Iowa — A gigantic winter storm dumped more than a foot of snow across much of the Midwest and New England as it marched eastward Wednesday, creating blizzard conditions, burying cars under huge drifts and providing ammunition for a massive campus snowball fight in Wisconsin.

Even more snow fell in some areas, with 16 inches reported in Des Moines and nearly 19 inches just south of Madison, Wis. Gusts of up to 50 mph created snow drifts between 8 and 15 feet tall and even knocked down a two-story Christmas tree in downtown Champaign, Ill.

The storm was blamed for at least 16 deaths, most in traffic accidents. Hundreds of schools canceled classes, power was knocked out to thousands of people from Missouri to New York and hundreds of flights were canceled.

In the Twin Cities, where about 6 inches of snow fell and the wind chill dipped to minus 9 degrees, Kent Barnard eased a massive orange snowplow into traffic in the suburb of Arden Hills on Wednesday morning. He dropped the right wing of the plow down onto the shoulder, making a grinding sound as the wing sent out a spray of snow.

"You gotta watch it because some people try to sneak up around you," Barnard said. "They'll see that big orange flashing truck coming and go, 'I don't want to get caught behind that thing.'"

The storm felt like a rude surprise after an unseasonably warm and dry November in parts of the region. The massive system is the first major blast of wintry weather for many parts of the Midwest.

"I've been dreading this day," said Kim Brust, shoveling the sidewalk in front of his Minneapolis home before sunrise Wednesday. "I was starting to enjoy the global warming."

While an inconvenience for many, others took an opportunity to play. At least 3,000 University of Wisconsin-Madison students took advantage of an unplanned day off and hurled snowballs at each other in a massive melee. Classes had been canceled for the first time in 19 years due to more than a foot of snow and blizzard-like conditions.

Some came holding trays as shields. Others were bundled up to protect themselves from the below-freezing temperatures and winds that gusted to more than 20 mph. Several went shirtless, though, while at least one had on pajamas.

"I figured with the day off, there was no better way to spend it than with a snowball fight," said Matt Moerel, 19, of Vadnais Heights, Minn.

Many New England residents braced for bone-chilling winds after digging out from a foot or more of snow. But Gavin Graham, 8, of Concord, N.H., spent two hours sledding.

"It was really good sledding. The snow was puffy, and that was really good because we had little jumps already made," he said. "It was awesome having the day off from school." □



Tom Morini uses snow shoes to walk to a friend's house during a snow storm in Derry, N.H., Wednesday Dec. 9, 2009. Parts of New Hampshire are expected to receive about a foot of snow, according to forecasters.

Associated Press



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Leftists form Latin America regional movement



Supporters of Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez wear T-shirts that read in Spanish "Uribe paramilitary," referring to Colombia's President Alvaro Uribe, at a protest in Caracas, Friday, Nov. 13, 2009. Demonstrators protested an agreement that allows the US to expand its military presence in Colombia.

JORGE RUEDA

Associated Press Writer

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Hundreds of leftists gathered in Venezuela's capital have set plans for a regional movement in Latin

America and are expressing support for insurgent groups like the rebels in Colombia. Some 950 people from 26 nations agreed to form the Bolivarian Continental Movement, named after South

Associated Press

American independence hero Simon Bolivar, said Zenaida Tahhan, who leads a chapter in Venezuela, said Wednesday after the conference wrapped up.

Participants included supporters of leftist Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Communist Party members as well as activists from other parts of the globe. Tahhan said some came from as far away as Turkey and Australia.

Attendees said they agreed on causes promoted by Chavez, including resisting what he calls U.S. "imperialism."

Yul Jabour, a member of the Venezuelan Communist Party, said the movement also agrees with the ideals of "any insurgent movement" — such as the leftist rebels in neighboring Colombia.

During the opening session Monday, organizers read

a message attributed to Alfonso Cano, commander of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, in which he saluted participants and called for the creation of a "continental political movement" to counter what he warned is a growing military threat from the "U.S. empire" in the region.

Colombia's government on Wednesday called the release of statements by FARC leaders an "affront to democracy" and asked Venezuela's government to clarify its position towards group sympathetic to terrorism and organized crime.

A foreign ministry statement said the movement's support for FARC leaders is equivalent to "supporting acts such as kidnappings, assassinations, car bombs and atrocities against the civilian

population."

Those at the gathering condemned Colombia's recent agreement allowing the U.S. military to use more of its bases — a stance shared by Chavez, who contends the deal poses a threat his government. Colombia says the agreement will be used only to help it fight drug trafficking and guerrillas inside its territory.

Chavez has denied supporting the Colombian rebels, but the guerrillas express an ideological affinity for the Venezuelan leader.

Colombian rebels have often used border areas of Venezuela as a haven to resupply and treat their wounded in recent years, creating friction with Colombia's U.S.-allied government, which is battling the guerrillas in a conflict that also involves outlawed right-wing paramilitary groups. □



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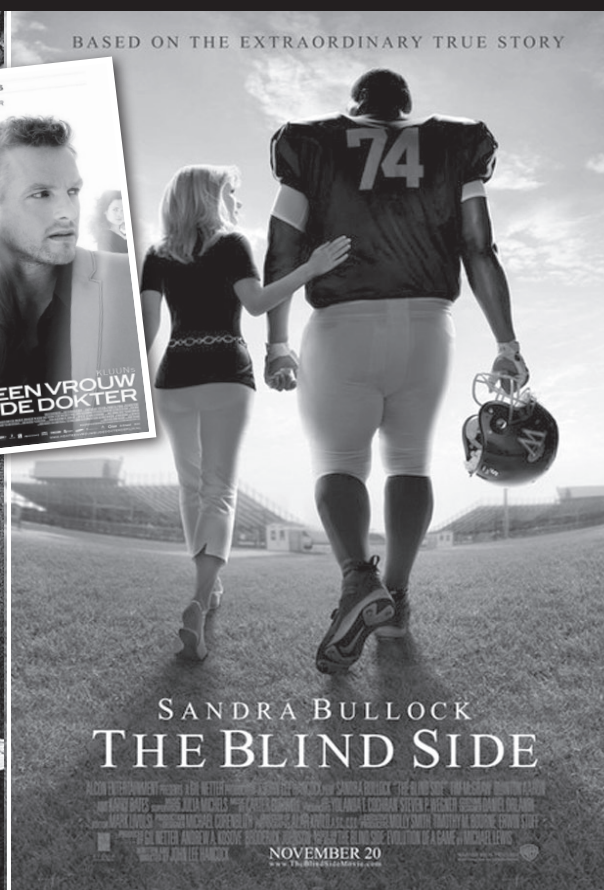
AT RENAISSANCE - ORANJESTAD

R	THE BLIND SIDE				NEW
	daily:	5:45	8:30		
	matinee:	12:00	2:45	late show:	11:30
G	THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG				
	daily:	4:45			
	matinee:	12:15	2:30	late show:	
R	PRECIOUS				
	daily:	7:00	9:30		
	matinee:		late show:	12:00	
R	NINJA ASSASSIN				
	daily:	4:00	6:30	8:45	
	matinee:	1:30	late show:	11:00	
PG	OLD DOGS				
	daily:	4:15	6:15	8:15	10:15
	matinee:	12:15	2:15	late show:	12:15
PG-13	2012				
	daily:	4:15	7:45		
	matinee:	12:45	late show:	11:15	
PG-13	THE TWILIGHT SAGA: NEW MOON				
	daily:	6:00	9:00		
	matinee:	12:15	3:00	late show:	11:45

AT PASEO HERENCIA

R	KOMT EEN VROUW BIJ DE DOKTER				NEW
	daily:	7:00	9:30		
	matinee:		late show:	12:00	
PG	ARMORED				NEW
	daily:	5:30	7:45	9:45	
	matinee:	1:00	3:15	late show:	12:00
PG-13	THE TWILIGHT SAGA: NEW MOON				
	daily:	5:45	8:45		
	matinee:	12:00	3:00	late show:	11:45
G	THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG				
	daily:	4:45			
	matinee:	12:15	2:30	late show:	
PG-13	2012				
	daily:	4:30	8:00		
	matinee:	1:00	late show:	11:30	
PG-13	A CHRISTMAS CAROL 3D				3D
	daily:	4:45			
	matinee:	12:15	2:30	late show:	
PG-13	EVERYBODY'S FINE				
	daily:	4:30	6:45	9:00	
	matinee:	12:00	2:15	late show:	11:15
R	PARANORMAL ACTIVITY				
	daily:	7:00	9:30		
	matinee:		late show:	11:45	

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WEST BANK

Continued from Page B1

The relatively large turnout on a cold, wintry night reflected support for increasingly fierce settler resistance to the government ban on most new housing.

The ban is designed to encourage resumption of peace talks with the Palestinians.

Settlers held signs and banners that read, "We will continue to build" and "stop Iran's nukes, not our homes." Netanyahu, a former ally, is widely perceived by the settlers to have caved in to American pressure.

Images of angry settlers blocking government inspectors from delivering stop-work orders and thousands of protesters across from his residence could help Netanyahu paint himself to be going as far as he can under the circumstances in the search for peace.

Palestinians dismiss the prime minister's building restrictions as insincere and insufficient, since they do not include east Jerusalem or 3,000 homes already under construction in the West Bank. The Palestinians claim all of the West Bank and east Jerusalem as parts of a future state.

They say they will not resume

talks until all settlement construction ceases.

At the demonstration, speakers railed against the restrictions and the crowd chanted, "Break the freeze!" Settler leader Dani Dayan complained, "Not one Jewish home can be built now."

An area was set aside for those who preferred a separation between men and women for religious reasons. Most of the demonstrators were Orthodox Jews — many of them teenagers.

Netanyahu announced the 10-month halt in most new West Bank housing construction last month in an attempt to restart peace talks, which broke down a year ago. The restrictions infuriated Jewish settlers and their backers in Netanyahu's hard-line coalition.

"I think this is a violation of people's basic rights if they can't build homes on their own property," said Jamie Levavi, a 25-year-old settler originally from Cleveland, Ohio. "If the people of Israel speak up enough, our own government will listen to us."

The settlers have been struggling to regain their strength since Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005, uprooting all 8,000 Israelis who were living there,

despite vocal and sometimes violent settler opposition.

Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, himself a settler, said the Jerusalem protest was legitimate.

"If someone came to you and froze construction on your house while you were building it, you would also object," he told Israel Radio. "I just hope the struggle and the resistance remain within the framework of a legitimate political protest that is acceptable in a democratic state."

Speaking after a meeting of top ministers and security chiefs on Wednesday, Netanyahu said the Palestinians seem to have adopted a strategy of "rejecting negotiations with Israel."

"This is a mistake. There can be no genuine solution without direct negotiations with Israel, in the framework of which we will reach agreements and arrangements between the sides," he said. The Israeli settlement watchdog group Peace Now also cast new doubts on the building freeze, saying that building in the West Bank continues to take place at a greater pace than elsewhere in Israel.

"Beyond the political dispute going on around the settlements, the argument



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, right, and Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, left, attend a session at the Knesset, Israel's Parliament in Jerusalem, Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2009. Israel's parliament has given preliminary approval to legislation that would require a national referendum on any peace deal that gives up control of east Jerusalem or the Golan Heights. If approved, the law could constrain a future Israeli government's ability to turn over captured land as part of a peace arrangement.

Associated Press
of the settlers that they are discriminated against is simply not true," said Peace Now leader Yariv Oppenheimer.

Some 300,000 settlers live in the West Bank, in addition to 180,000 Jewish Israelis living in east Jerusalem, captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war and annexed soon after. Netanyahu opposes any withdrawal from east Jerusalem, which Israel considers part of its eternal undivided capital.

The strong resistance at home could help Netanyahu in his

political battles, casting him as a strong leader willing to make concessions in the face of fierce opposition from his own supporters.

Some of Wednesday's protesters said they would be willing to go to jail over their resistance.

"We want to show the world that there is opposition and we are willing to fight," said Joab Tzarum, 49. "We want peace, but not peace at any price. Not peace in the form of a noose. This freeze is a noose for the land of Israel and the people of Israel." □

Iraq orders security shakeup after Baghdad blasts



Mohammed Saad, 18, warms up on a small fire as he stands in front of his destroyed house in Baghdad, Iraq, Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2009. Saad's house collapsed in one of series of coordinated attacks struck Baghdad Tuesday.

(AP Photo/Hadi Mizban)

By **CHELSEA J. CARTER**,
Associated Press Writer
BAGHDAD — Iraq's Western-backed government — facing intense pressure to address security lapses after suicide bombings killed 127 people in the capital — ordered a shake-up Wednesday in the country's military leadership. The angry mood that led Prime

Minister Nouri al-Maliki to replace Baghdad's top military commander reveals a stark psychological shift among Iraqis who once accepted such violence as routine and are now demanding someone pay a political price. Al-Maliki appealed for Iraqis to be patient as he signaled more changes might be ahead

for security officials. The prime minister was expected to attend a special parliamentary session Thursday, where lawmakers demanded his security ministers answer for lapses that allowed for the attacks.

"I call on the Iraqi people for more patience and steadfastness," al-Maliki said in a televised address.

It was unclear whether the replacement of Lt. Gen. Abboud Qanbar would quiet outraged lawmakers, who are questioning how suicide bombers managed to launch multiple attacks Tuesday in heavily guarded central Baghdad. The blasts wounded more than 500.

Much of al-Maliki's appeal was aimed at calming anger that has united Iraq's ethnic and sectarian rivals — from Kurd to Arab, Shiite to Sunni — with their calls on Iraq's interior and defense ministers to resign.

"They have proved failures,"

said Saadi al-Barzanji, a Kurdish lawmaker.

Even the group that Iraq has accused of masterminding this week's bombings as well as two previous major attacks has called on security officials to step down.

"He who cannot ensure security for Iraqis should leave," Baath party spokesman Khudair al-Murshidi told Al-Jazeera in an interview from Syria. Al-Murshidi has denied that loyalists of Saddam Hussein's Baath party were behind any of the attacks.

Top security officials have twice failed to appear after being called before lawmakers. Those request followed suicide bombings against government buildings Aug. 19 and Oct. 25. More than 250 were killed in the earlier attacks.

Ayad al-Samarrie, the parliament speaker, on Tuesday again called on the ministers and others to appear before legislators, said Omar al-Mashhadani, the speaker's

spokesman.

Interior Minister Jawad al-Bolani said he would attend the session only if it was not held behind closed doors, according to a statement released by his office. It was not clear whether his demand was met or whether other officials would attend. Security matters have typically been discussed in parliament in closed session. The political fallout provides a sharp contrast to what occurred following attacks that produced equal or greater devastation in previous years in Baghdad.

At the height of the insurgency, tens of thousands died in street fighting and bombing attacks with virtually no calls for resignations.

During the address on state television, al-Maliki said Iraq's security strategies would be reviewed and possible personnel changes made. He stopped short of saying whether any of his ministers would be held responsible. □



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AP Source: Pettitte, Yankees agree at \$11.75M

RONALD BLUM

AP Sports Writer

INDIANAPOLIS

(AP)

— Andy Pettitte is staying with the New York Yankees, agreeing to an \$11.75 million, one-year contract.

The deal Wednesday represents a raise for the 37-year-old left-hander, who made \$10.5 million last season and helped the Yankees win their 27th World Series title.

His agreement was confirmed by two people familiar with the talks who spoke on condition of anonymity because no announcement had been made.

Pettitte became the first pitcher to start and win the clincher in all three postseason rounds. After beating Minnesota and the Los Angeles Angels in the AL playoffs, he defeated the Philadelphia Phillies on three days' rest in the sixth and final



FILE - This is an Oct. 31, 2009, file photo showing New York Yankees' Andy Pettitte pitching against the Philadelphia Phillies during the first inning of Game 3 of the Major League Baseball World Series, in Philadelphia.

game of the World Series, earning his fifth championship ring.

Pettitte was 14-8 with a 4.16 ERA in 32 regular-season starts, and 4-0 with a 3.52 ERA in five postseason starts.

His 18 postseason victories are a major league record.

He had a \$5.5 million base salary last season and earned \$3 million in bonuses based on innings and \$2 million for staying on the active roster

Associated Press

the entire season. He missed \$750,000 bonuses for 200 and 210 innings, finishing with 194 2-3.

New York originally offered him \$10 million last December but cut the guaranteed amount after it agreed to big-money contracts with CC Sabathia, A.J. Burnett and Mark Teixeira. The move was the third of the winter meetings for the Yankees.

They reached a preliminary agreement to acquire center fielder Curtis Granderson from Detroit as part of a three-team, seven-deal deal sending right-hander Ian Kennedy to Arizona, and lefty reliever Phil Coke and outfield prospect Austin Jackson to Detroit.

New York also dealt reliever Brian Bruney to Washington for a player to be named — the first pick in Thursday's winter meeting draft. □



In this Dec. 5, 2009, photo Alabama defensive back Rod Woodson (18), linebacker Jonathan Atchison, center, and defensive lineman Darrington Sentimore (94) celebrate after their 32-13 win over Florida in the NCAA college football SEC championship game at the Georgia Dome in Atlanta.

Associated Press

House panel passes college football playoff bill

By FREDERIC J. FROMMER

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Dismissing complaints from some members that Congress had more pressing matters, a House subcommittee approved legislation Wednesday aimed at forcing college football to switch to a playoff system to determine its national champion.

“We can walk across the street and chew gum at the same time,” said the subcommittee chairman, Illinois Democrat Bobby Rush, one of the bill's co-sponsors. “We can do a number of things at the same time.”

The legislation, which still faces steep odds, would ban the promotion of a postseason NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision game as a national championship unless it results from a playoff. The measure passed by voice vote in the House Energy and Commerce Committee's commerce, trade and consumer protection subcommittee, with one audible “no,” from Rep. John Barrow, D-Ga.

Continued on Page B12

NHL Roundup

Richards, Carter, Giroux score two; Flyers snap skid

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Mike Richards, Jeff Carter and Claude Giroux scored two goals each as the Philadelphia Flyers beat the New York Islanders 6-2 on Tuesday for their first win under new coach Peter Laviolette.

Brian Boucher, taking over No. 1 goalie duties from injured Ray Emery, made 22 saves for the Flyers, who broke a five-game losing streak.

The Flyers had dropped two consecutive games — including an 8-2 home loss to Washington on Saturday — after Laviolette replaced fired coach John Stevens on Friday.

Islanders rookie John Tavares scored both goals for New York.

Canadiens 4, Senators 1

At Ottawa, Jaroslav Halak made 45 saves and Tomas Plekanec had three assists as Montreal extended its winning streak to three games with a victory over Ottawa.

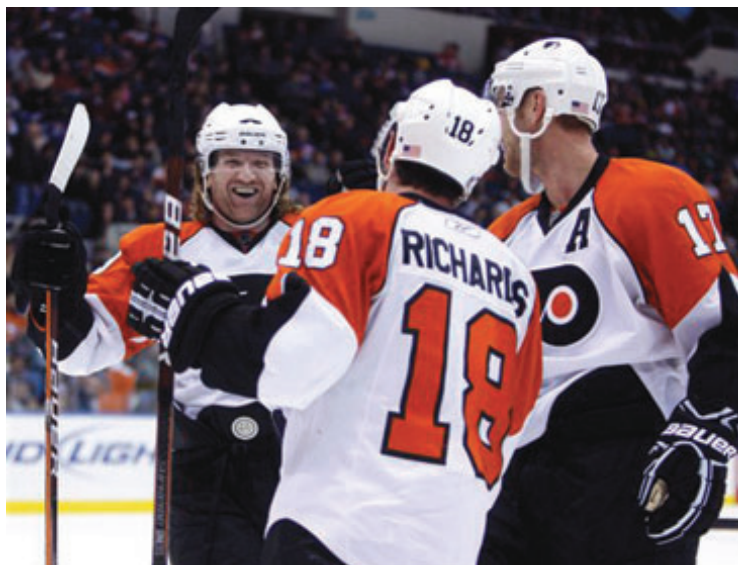
Mike Cammalleri, Marc-Andre Bergeron and Andrei Kostitsyn all scored for the second night in a row, and Scott Gomez added an empty-net goal.

Mike Fisher scored his 13th goal early in the second for Ottawa, which had a five-game, home-winning streak snapped despite a 46-27 shots advantage.

Brian Elliot stopped 23 shots in his ninth straight start for the Senators.

Predators 4, Canucks 2

At Nashville, Tennessee, Martin Erat had his second career NHL hat trick and added an assist to lead Nashville over Vancouver. The Predators beat the Canucks at home for the first time since



Philadelphia Flyers' Scott Hartnell, left, celebrates his goal with teammates Mike Richards, center, and Jeff Carter during the third period of an NHL hockey game against the New York Islanders, Wednesday, Nov. 25, 2009, in Uniondale, N.Y. The Flyers won 2-1.

Associated Press

Nov. 23, 2006.

Patric Hornqvist had the other goals for the Predators. Ryan Kesler and Daniel Sedin scored for Vancouver.

Ducks 4, Stars 3, OT.

At Anaheim, California, Dan Sexton, playing in his third NHL game, scored his first two NHL goals as Anaheim beat Dallas. Sexton scored his second goal with 62 seconds left in regulation and Saku Koivu scored 4:13 into overtime.

In other NHL games around the league: Philadelphia 6, N.Y. Islanders 2; Montreal 4, Ottawa 1; Nashville 4, Vancouver 2; and Anaheim 4, Dallas 3, OT. □

NFL Preview

Slumping Steelers picking up pieces

TOM WITHERS

AP Sports Writer

CLEVELAND — The Pittsburgh Steelers desperately need to beat the Cleveland Browns on Thursday to straighten out an NFL season slipping away.

The Browns hope a win can bring salvation to a season that ended long ago — and could end with coach Eric Mangini's dismissal.

Strapped with four straight defeats, their longest losing streak since 2003, and with a weakening playoff pulse, the Super Bowl champion Steelers are in some serious trouble.

"It's tough because we haven't gonethroughthis," quarterback Ben Roethlisberger said. "Most of the guys have never had this situation before, so it's tough and it's frustrating. But we can't sit around here and pout and worry about things because that's not going to change the outcome of the games we just played."

Following last week's loss to Oakland, Steelers coach Mike Tomlin, who had predicted his

team would "unleash hell" in December, instead unleashed on his team by lamenting "a pattern of behavior that's unacceptable."

Perhaps thinking his team needed a scare, he promised lineup changes against the Browns, but has since backed off a bit. Tomlin still believes in his squad but he's troubled by the Steelers' inability to close out opponents.

Pittsburgh's defense has been unable to protect a lead in five of the six losses.

"Good teams find ways to win," he said. "Teams that are not good don't."

Think the Steelers have problems? It's worse, so much worse, for the Browns, who have lost seven straight games, 10 in a row at home, and 12 consecutive to the Steelers.

To this point, Mangini's first season has been the ugliest in Cleveland history. The Browns' offense and defense are each ranked dead last statistically and there's little tangible evidence the team has improved under Mangini.

Already some are wondering whether owner Randy Lerner, who is conducting a clandestine search for a "serious, credible leader" to run the football side of his floundering organization, will retain Mangini.

"I've met fans who said, 'If you can just beat the Steelers that will make our year, no matter what you're record is,'" wide receiver Josh Cribbs said. "We're not purposely trying to knock them out of the playoffs, but if winning does that, so be it." □

Pittsburgh Steelers coach Mike Tomlin looks on from the sidelines during the first half of an NFL football game against the Baltimore Ravens, Sunday, Nov. 29, 2009, in Baltimore. The Ravens won 20-17 in overtime.

Associated Press



AP Source: Cowboys' Adams fined \$50k for shove

Cowboys left tackle Flozell Adams \$50,000 for shoving New York Giants defensive end Justin Tuck in the back, a person familiar with the fine told The Associated Press.

Adams did not receive a suspension, said the person, who requested anonymity on Wednesday because the punishment had not yet been announced by the league.

Adams already has been fined \$25,000 for incidents in three other games this season, including \$12,500 stemming from Dallas' first meeting with New York in September, when Adams tripped Tuck.

As a repeat offender, and with a history of tangling with Tuck, there was thought that Adams could be forced to sit out a game □



This is a Nov. 15, 2009, file photo showing Dallas Cowboys offensive tackle Flozell Adams during an NFL football game against the Green Bay Packers, in Green Bay, Wis.

Associated Press

IRVING, Texas (AP) — The NFL has docked Dallas

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NBA Roundup

Howard back to lead Mavericks over Suns

DALLAS (AP) — Josh Howard looked sharp coming off a 13-game break after ankle surgery, scoring 18 of his 20 points in the second half to lead the Dallas Mavericks to a nervous 102-101 win over the Phoenix Suns in the NBA on Tuesday.

Howard scored 16 points during a stretch late in the third quarter and early in the fourth when Dallas went from being tied 66-66 to leading 88-79.

The Mavericks had looked in control, but Phoenix made it interesting with three 3-pointers in the final 48 seconds.

Celtics 98, Bucks 89

In Boston, the hosts won their eighth in a row, overcoming Milwaukee.

Rajon Rondo had 13 assists and nine rebounds and scored all of his 11 points in the fourth quarter to guide the Celtics home, giving them a share of the overall NBA lead with Orlando.

Kevin Garnett scored 25 to go with nine boards, as Boston scored 12 of the game's final 15 points after a tight contest. Andrew Bogut had 25 points and 14 rebounds for the Bucks, who suffered a fourth straight loss.

Magic 97, Clippers 86

In Los Angeles, Orlando made it six straight by defeating Los Angeles.

Dwight Howard had 25 points and 11 rebounds on his 24th birthday and Rashard Lewis added 17 points for the Magic, who also won an eighth straight road game, setting a new franchise record for a single season.

Eric Gordon scored 21 points for the Clippers.

Bobcats 107, Nuggets 95

In Charlotte, North Carolina, Gerald Wallace had 25 points and 16 rebounds as Charlotte snapped Denver's four-game winning streak.

Stephen Jackson had 25 points, seven rebounds and six assists for the Bobcats,

who outscored Denver 20-8 over the final 6 minutes.

Denver's Carmelo Anthony had 34 points and seven rebounds but picked up a technical foul with just under a minute left.

Grizzlies 111, Cavaliers 109, OT

In Memphis, Tennessee, Mike Conley drove past Shaquille O'Neal for a layup with 3 seconds left to give Memphis an overtime victory over Cleveland.

Cleveland's LeBron James, who had 43 points and 13 rebounds, took the last shot, but his 30-footer hit the rim, snapping the Cavaliers' four-game winning streak.

Zach Randolph led Memphis with 32 points and 14 rebounds, while O.J. Mayo scored 28.

James' two free throws with 15 seconds left tied the game at 109. But on the ensuing possession, Conley drove to the right side of the basket, lofting it off the glass.

The two teams were tied at 100 at the end of regulation. Cleveland had the final possession, but James fumbled a dribble, and by the time he gathered the ball, his desperation jump shot was

short.

In New Orleans, David West had 24 points and 12 rebounds to lift New Orleans over Sacramento.

Chris Paul had 15 points and 12 assists for New Orleans.

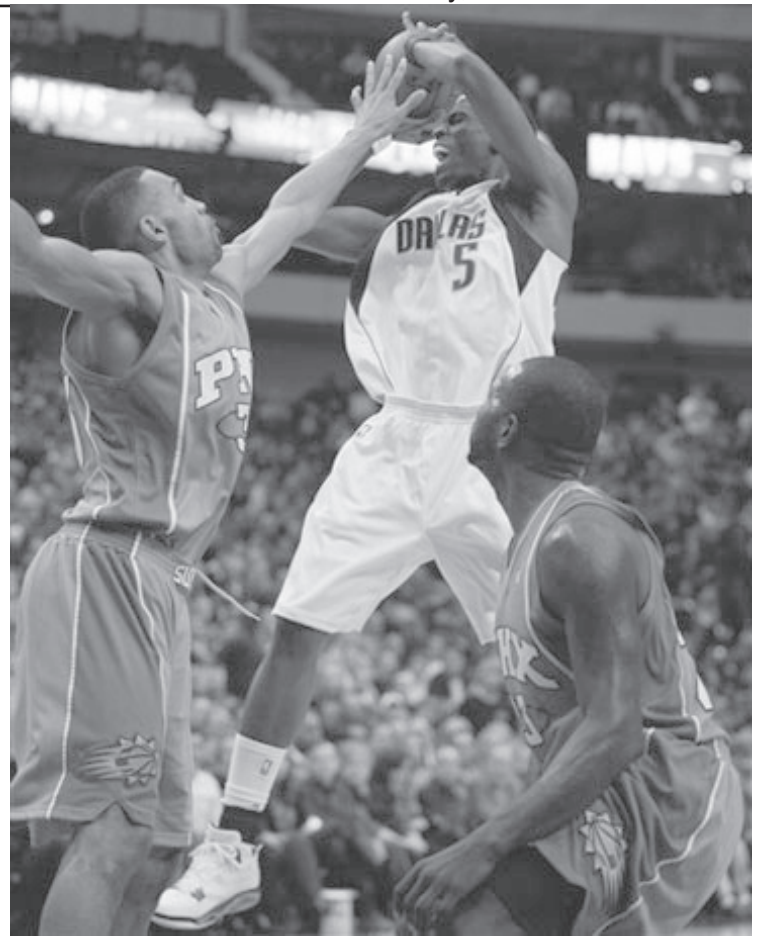
Sacramento's Andres Nocioni had a chance to tied it when he was fouled with just over a second left. He missed his first free throw, then deliberately missed the second in the hope of a putback, but a Kings' lane violation ruined that opportunity.

Raptors 94, Timberwolves 88

In Toronto, the hosts finally got their first three-game winning trot of the season, downing Minnesota.

Chris Bosh had 21 points and 16 rebounds and Jarrett Jack had 17 points and eight assists for the Raptors, who extended their winning streak over Minnesota to 11 games — dating to 2003-04.

In other NBA games it was, Charlotte 107, Denver 95; Toronto 94, Minnesota 88; Boston 98, Milwaukee 89; Memphis 111, Cleveland 109, OT; New Orleans 96, Sacramento 94; New Jersey 103, Chicago 101; Dallas 102, Phoenix 101; and Orlando 97, L.A. Clippers 86. □



Nation's capital requests 2012 Giro d'Italia start

MILAN (AP) — The mayor of Washington has reportedly agreed to meet with organizers of the Giro d'Italia on Thursday to request that the start of the 2012 race be held in the U.S. capital.

Adrian Fenty will discuss the idea with race director Angelo Zomegnan on Thursday, La Gazzetta dello Sport reported Wednesday.

"There's a lot of enthusiasm in America for the Giro, they're enticed by it," Zomegnan said. "(Lance) Armstrong's participation in the centenary race certainly added to the enthusiasm.

"The Giro is popular abroad, not only in Belgium and Holland, where we will start the 2010 race, but from countries such as Liechtenstein, Denmark, Spain, Germany and France."

Last month, a working group exploring a U.S. start to the 2012 Giro said two stages in Washington were being considered, a prologue and a stage race. □

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House Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection subcommittee Chairman Rep. Bobby Rush, D-Ill., center, flanked by subcommittee counsel Timothy Robinson, left, and subcommittee member Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas, presides over the subcommittee's hearing to markup legislation on a BCS college football playoff system, Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2009, on Capitol Hill in Washington.

Associated Press

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Continued from Page B9

"With all due respect, I really think we have more important things to spend our time on," Barrow said before the vote, although he stressed he didn't like the current Bowl Championship Series, either.

The BCS selections announced last weekend pit two unbeaten teams, No. 1 Alabama and No. 2 Texas, in the Jan. 7 national title game. Three other undefeated teams — TCU, Cincinnati and Boise State — will play in a BCS bowl game, but not for the championship.

"What can we say — it's December and the BCS is in chaos again," said the bill's sponsor, Rep. Joe Barton of Texas, the top Republican on the House Energy and Commerce Committee. He said the BCS system is unfair and won't change unless prompted by Congress.

The legislation, which goes to the full committee, would make it illegal to promote a national championship game "or make a similar representation," unless it results from a playoff.

There is no Senate version, although Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, has pressed for a Justice Department antitrust investigation into the BCS.

Shortly after his election last year, Barack Obama said there should be a playoff system.

In a statement before the vote, BCS executive director Bill Hancock said, "With all the serious matters facing our country, surely Congress has more important issues than spending taxpayer money to dictate how college football is played."

Yet Barrow wasn't alone in criticizing his colleagues' priorities; Reps. Zach Space, D-Ohio, and Bart Stupak, D-Mich., made similar arguments. Space said that with people facing tough times, the decision to focus on college football sends the "wrong message."

The legislation has a tough road ahead, given the wide geographic representation and political clout of schools in the six conferences that have automatic BCS bowl bids — the ACC, Big East, Big 12, Big Ten, Pac-10 and SEC. The current college bowl system features a championship game between the two top teams in the BCS standings, based on two polls and six computer rankings. Eight other schools play in the Orange, Sugar, Fiesta and Rose bowls. Under the BCS, the champions of those six big conference have automatic bids, while other conferences don't. Those six conferences also receive far more money than the other conferences. □

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Perú busca relanzar relaciones con Bolivia de reelecto Morales

LIMA (Reuters) - Perú buscará “desideologizar” las relaciones con Bolivia para relanzar los tratos bilaterales que habían quedado rezagados por entredichos entre los presidentes Alan García y Evo Morales, dijo el miércoles el nuevo embajador de Lima en La Paz, Manuel Rodríguez. Morales, quien lleva adelante una vasta nacionalización de su economía y es aliado del izquierdista mandatario venezolano Hugo Chávez, logró el domingo una contundente reelección que extenderá su mandato hasta el 2015.

En tanto, el presidente García, un fervoroso promotor de la inversión privada y amigo del libre mercado, dejará su mandato de cinco años en el 2011 sin posibilidad de postular a una reelección porque las leyes electorales locales lo impiden.

“Con Bolivia creo que tenemos distintas políticas económicas, pero lo que debemos hacer es



Foto de archivo de los presidentes Alan García (izquierda en la imagen), de Perú, y Evo Morales, de Bolivia, durante una visita oficial de este último al palacio de Gobierno en Lima, ago 1 2007. REUTERS/Pilar Olivares (PERU)

no ideologizar las relaciones, hay que desideologizar las relaciones en toda América

Latina, allí vamos a encontrar puntos de contacto muy importantes”, dijo Rodríguez a la radioemisora local RPP. “Hay que relanzar las relaciones del Perú y Bolivia a sus niveles históricos”, agregó el diplomático, quien fue canciller de Perú durante

el mandato del anterior presidente Alejandro Toledo. Morales expresó el lunes no tener problemas con su colega García. “Es mi amigo”, dijo, aunque reconoció sus diferencias en política económica y de posición en cuanto a pactos de libre

comercio, que considera afectan a los pueblos de la región.

Perú se mantuvo sin embajador en La Paz durante 45 días, llamado en consulta luego de que Morales calificara como “genocidio del neoliberalismo” la muerte de 34 policías e indígenas en una protesta en la Amazonía peruana.

Las relaciones entre Bolivia y Perú han pasado por una cadena de roces en los últimos años, debido en principio, a diferencias en torno a la negociación de un acuerdo comercial entre la Comunidad Andina y la Unión Europea (UE).

Entre los roces figuran además la protesta de Bolivia porque Perú concedió asilo a ex ministros bolivianos acusados de genocidio y la denuncia de Lima de negociaciones bajo la mesa entre La Paz y Chile para una salida al mar del país altiplánico.

Chile debe consultar a Perú sobre una eventual cesión de un acceso marítimo a Bolivia, en caso de que ello se produzca por un territorio que fue peruano hasta la “Guerra del Pacífico”. □

Procuraduría Colombia investiga ministro de Uribe

BOGOTÁ (Reuters) - La Procuraduría de Colombia abrió el miércoles una investigación disciplinaria contra 18 funcionarios del Gobierno, incluido el ministro de Agricultura y su antecesor, al parecer implicados en la adjudicación irregular de subsidios agrícolas por 3,8 millones de dólares.

La decisión de la entidad que se encarga de vigilar a los funcionarios al servicio del Estado involucra a Andrés Fernández, a su antecesor y aspirante a la presidencia de Colombia Andrés Felipe Arias, además de otros 16 funcionarios. En la eventualidad de que los funcionarios se han encontrados culpables de actuaciones irregulares podrían quedar inhabilitados para ejercer cargos públicos, incluyendo los de elección popular, lo que bloquearía la carrera política de Arias.

La adjudicación de subsidios agrícolas es el más reciente escándalo que sacude el Gobierno del presidente Alvaro Uribe, quien aún no ha anunciado ni rechazado la posibilidad de ser candidato en las elecciones del 2010 para buscar su segunda reelección inmediata.

“Se trata de una etapa o de otro ritual más avanzado dentro de la investigación”, dijo a periodistas la viceprocuradora Martha Isabel Castañeda.

“Estamos examinando las presuntas irregularidades para determinar más adelante si emitimos pliego de cargos, no sólo contra este ex funcionario y el funcionario actual, sino contra 16 personas más”, explicó. □

Chávez y Fernández firman acuerdos de cooperación

BUENOS AIRES (AP) - La presidenta de Argentina, Cristina Kirchner, y su par de Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, firmaron el miércoles acuerdos de cooperación en materia de turismo, ingeniería, energía y salud, entre otros, que refuerzan la alianza estratégica entre ambos países. “De la misma manera que vos nos ayudaste en momentos muy difíciles, la Argentina va a ayudar a Venezuela todas las veces que su pueblo lo necesite. Es de bien nacidos ser agradecidos y nosotros somos agradecidos”, señaló Fernández ante Chávez en un acto celebrado en la Casa Rosada posterior a la firma de los acuerdos.

Por su parte, Chávez afirmó que “a pesar de las dificultades de cada quien y de la crisis del modelo mundial, tenemos una oportunidad como nunca antes para coronar en este siglo la

independencia de Argentina, de Venezuela y de la Patria Grande”.

“Estoy convencido de que los dos países, por más pasión y fuerza que le impriman, si se quedan dentro de las fronteras no hay independencia posible”, dijo el mandatario, cuyo discurso se extendió durante más de una hora y quien vino a Argentina acompañado de una nutrida delegación de funcionarios.

Chávez y Fernández han mantenido varios encuentros este año en el marco del programa de cooperación que mantienen ambos países. Fernández instó a que América Latina supere sus asimetrías, tal como hizo la Unión Europea para formar una gran zona de comercio. “Eso es un signo de inteligencia, querer que el de al lado tenga las mismas posibilidades que uno”, dijo. □

En Chile

Candidato derechista Sebastián Piñera se mantiene como favorito

SANTIAGO DE CHILE (AP) - A cuatro días de la elección presidencial el candidato Sebastián Piñera se mantiene como amplio favorito para ganar la elección del domingo y el director de una encuestadora no descartó que el abanderado opositor derechista se imponga en primera vuelta.

“No descartaría que (Piñera) ganara en primera vuelta, es una hipótesis”, dijo en rueda de prensa el director del Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Contemporánea (CERC), Carlos Huneeus. Piñera, de 60 años, apoyado por la alianza de los partidos Renovación Nacional (RN) y Unión Demócrata Independiente (UDI) se ha mantenido al frente de todas las encuestas desde el inicio de la carrera presidencial a comienzos de año. Piñera, un multimillonario empresario, fue derrotado en 2006 en segunda vuelta por la presidenta Michelle Bachelet. Huneeus declinó entregar cifras de encuesta sobre la primera vuelta e insistió que se trataba de una predicción. Según su hipótesis, Piñera se impondría el domingo

con el 44,1% contra el 31% del candidato oficialista Eduardo Frei, y el 17,7% del diputado independiente Marco Enríquez-Ominami. El representante de la izquierda Jorge Arrate obtendría el 7,2%. En cambio, Huneeus entregó el resultado de la encuesta enfocada a una segunda vuelta el 17 de enero otorgando a Piñera el 49% y a Frei el 32%.

Añadió que si el adversario de Piñera en segunda vuelta fuese Enríquez-Ominami, un joven diputado independiente que se marginó del oficialismo, la victoria del candidato derechista sería más estrecha. Piñera obtendría el 47% contra el 35% de Marco Enríquez-Ominami.

El sondeo de CERC fue realizado a 1.200 personas de todo el país entre el 24 de noviembre y el 5 de diciembre, con un margen de error del 3%.

Huneeus, uno de los más antiguos encuestadores del país, señaló que si bien un escenario de segunda vuelta podría cambiar, Piñera estaría ganando y que “la derecha está en mejores condiciones que nunca” de alcanzar el poder.

Otro sondeo encargado por el matutino El Mercurio mostró también el favoritismo de Piñera, aunque el resultado de segunda vuelta sería más incierto, considerando el margen de error del 2,8%. En ese sondeo también a 1.200 personas de Santiago, Concepción y Valparaíso, las tres ciudades más populosas de Chile, Piñera vencería en el balotaje con el 42,5% contra el 34,4% de Frei.

Pero si el que avance a segunda vuelta es Enríquez-Ominami el triunfo de Piñera sería del 40,7% contra el 34,8% de su contendor.

Piñera, quien cierra su campaña este jueves con la pretensión de hacer una demostración de fuerzas con una masiva concentración en el centro capitalino, predijo el miércoles que el domingo “vamos a ganar ampliamente”, aunque rehusó poner su predicción en cifras.

Los otros candidatos optaron por actos en comunas populares o en ciudades del interior. La campaña electoral concluye a la medianoche del jueves.

El eventual triunfo de Piñera motivó el mes pasado la



El candidato presidencial oficialista Eduardo Frei, saluda a sus partidarios durante una actividad en Santiago, el miércoles 9 de diciembre de 2009. El ex presidente Frei figura en el segundo lugar en las encuestas previas a los comicios del domingo 13 de diciembre. (Photo/Claudio Cruz)

propuesta del candidato izquierdista Jorge Arrate a formar un frente común con los otros dos candidatos contra el abanderado de la derecha. Pero Frei no ha se

ha pronunciado y Enríquez-Ominami virtualmente lo descartó, pese a que algunos de sus allegados han participado en conversaciones con los otros sectores. □

Ajuste banca fortalece a Chávez

CARACAS (Reuters) - El cierre de siete bancos con problemas y el arresto de algunos de sus millonarios dueños, vinculados con el Gobierno, podría satisfacer en parte el apetito del público por culpables y ayudar al presidente Hugo Chávez en la elección legislativa de septiembre del 2010.

Tras meses difíciles de caída de popularidad y deficiencias en los servicios de agua y electricidad, el militar retirado intenta quitar la iniciativa a sus adversarios y acallar las acusaciones de que permite corrupción en la cima del Gobierno.

“Aquí no hay vacas sagradas”, dijo Chávez esta semana luego de la renuncia de uno de sus ministros más cercanos, cuyo hermano encarcelado lideraba uno de los siete bancos cerrados por irregularidades, incluyendo fondos sospechosos.

“Grandes estafadores tienen que ir a prisión”, agregó.

La limpieza golpeó a dos grupos interconectados de la élite apodada “Boliburguesía” por el héroe independentista Simón Bolívar, que Chávez dice que inspira su “revolución”. □

Perú negocia compras de equipo militar de China y Brasil

LIMA (Reuters) - Perú negocia la compra de tanques de China y aviones de Brasil para reemplazar equipo militar “obsoleto”, adquisiciones que no responden a una carrera armamentista en la región, dijo el miércoles el Gobierno.

El primer ministro Javier Velásquez afirmó que la renovación de parte del equipo militar peruano es “responsabilidad del Gobierno”, para hacer de sus Fuerzas Armadas y policiales una “auténtica fuerza disuasiva”.

El anuncio peruano de compras militares se produce en momentos en que Lima ha lanzado una propuesta para limitar los gastos en armamento, ante la creciente adquisición de material bélico que ha inquietado a varios países de Sudamérica.

En un desfile militar el martes, Perú exhibió cinco tanques chinos MBT-2000 como prueba

para reemplazar tanques de origen soviético comprados en su mayoría en la década de 1970.

El desfile reemplazó el tradicional paseo de las Fuerzas Armadas de Perú por el Día de la Independencia a fines de julio, un evento muy concurrido por los peruanos y que fue postergado por temor a la propagación de la gripe H1N1.

“Se trata de una reposición de equipos y no de ir a una carrera incesante de armamentismo”, dijo Velásquez a la radioemisora local RPP.

El ministro de Defensa peruano, Rafael Rey, afirmó por su parte que el Gobierno de Lima negocia también la compra de una flota de aviones “Súpertucanos” procedentes de Brasil, que serán utilizados para combatir a la guerrilla y el narcotráfico que actúan principalmente en la selva del país.

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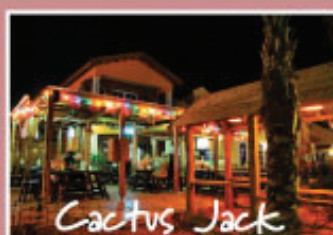


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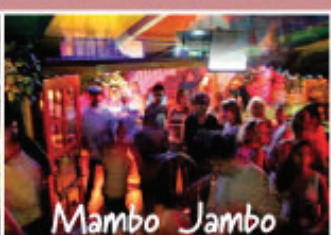
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